

VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: June 2025

15 May

May Walk

The recommendation that the proposed route should be checked over by the organiser was re-inforced by this walk. Why? All very simple. We “oldies” cannot always be guaranteed to read an ordinance survey map correctly and even with accompanying instructions!

But let's start at the very beginning. For a variety of reasons the number of expected walkers had plummeted and then with the sudden illness of the “organiser” we were left with three – John Powell, Paul Manuel and me. But we were to be joined by Bryan King, Mike Highstead and Tony Marriott at Brakspear's 16th Century Holly Bush, Redbourn for lunch.

Across Redbourn Common, down Waterend Lane, cross the by pass and into the fields. Not a hitch until we neared Hammonds End and where we decided to take a longer route than planned (we were ahead of schedule anyway) but that entailed a walk through the rugby club car park and very much single file along Redbourn Lane before turning into the golf club entrance. We skirted the 6th hole of the golf club and suddenly came across a golf ball. Amazingly it was the very ball that I had put “out of bounds” the previous day. Non golfers may well ask how did I know it was my mine. Every golfer has to have a distinguishing mark on his/her ball.

Apart from a slight hiccup at Redbournbury Mill and where the chalk stream was flowing very freely we had a straightforward route to the Holly Bush. Incidentally the pub runs Friday lunchtime jazz and usually the group that played at the previous week's Chairman's lunch. Also run trad jazz twice a month on a Wednesday lunchtime. Pre booking essential.



The six of us enjoyed our meal and toasted the absent organiser Sandy Bisland for setting a very pleasant and non strenuous walk albeit nearly 5 miles - with our additions.

Report by Reserve Walk Leader - Graham Westwell

19 May

National Theatre and King's Chapel of the Savoy

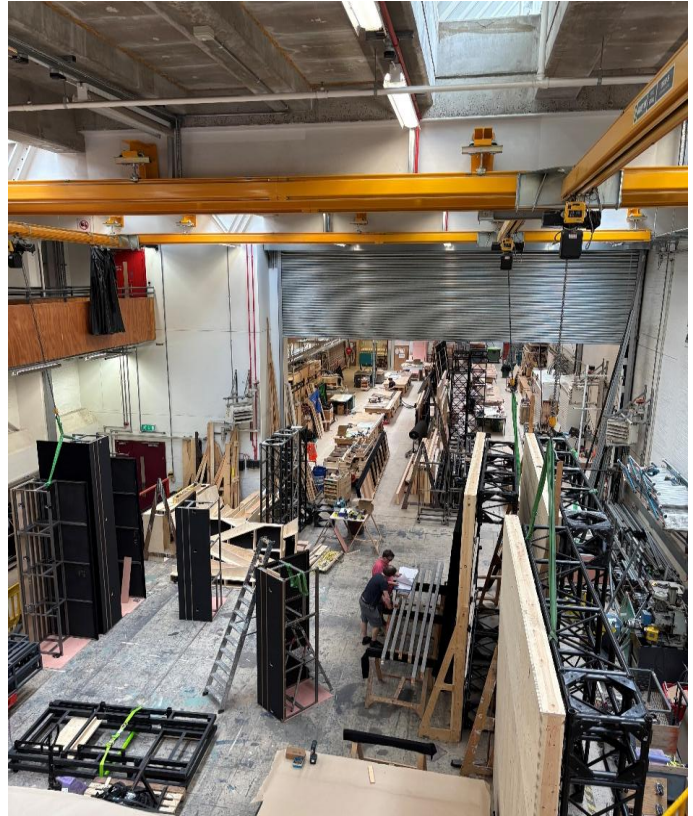
Sandy Bisland, Bryan and Linda King, Bryan Coventry, Paul and Helen Manuel, John Powell, Richard Upton and I -and wearing our comfortable walking shoes- gathered on Platform 1 for the train to Blackfriars. We strolled along the Embankment with the tide out in good time to join the 75 minutes long public tour commencing at 11.30am.

Firstly, a brief history viz: in 1962 Laurence Olivier was appointed the first Director of the National Theatre. He gathered round him various luminaries and was offered The Old Vic by the Governors of that theatre. In 1973 the present Grade 2 listed NT complex was designed by Denys Lasdun and his first theatre design. After the usual building challenges, it was opened in 1976 even though not complete. No longer connected to the Old Vic and Young Vic.

After donning high visibility jackets to ensure backstage staff would know we were visitors our first stop was the Olivier Theatre and where we were for some unknown reason (both pre and post the visit) issued with hard hats. The Olivier has a semi- circular auditorium and seats 1150. A perfect view from every seat with excellent raking and leg room. Current production ending Saturday is Dear England.



Then through a labyrinth of corridors to a viewing gallery overlooking the woodworking, painting, props design workshops. We didn't visit costumes but most, as with sets and props not in use, are stored in a huge warehouse in the East End. The NT is self-sufficient in creating everything involved in their productions apart from a small buy in of second-hand props.



Back through the corridors to the Lyttleton Theatre with a traditional proscenium arch stage seating 850 people. Very stark walls of cement blocks.



The guide was enthusiastic, humorous and loved giving side quips. He made the tour.



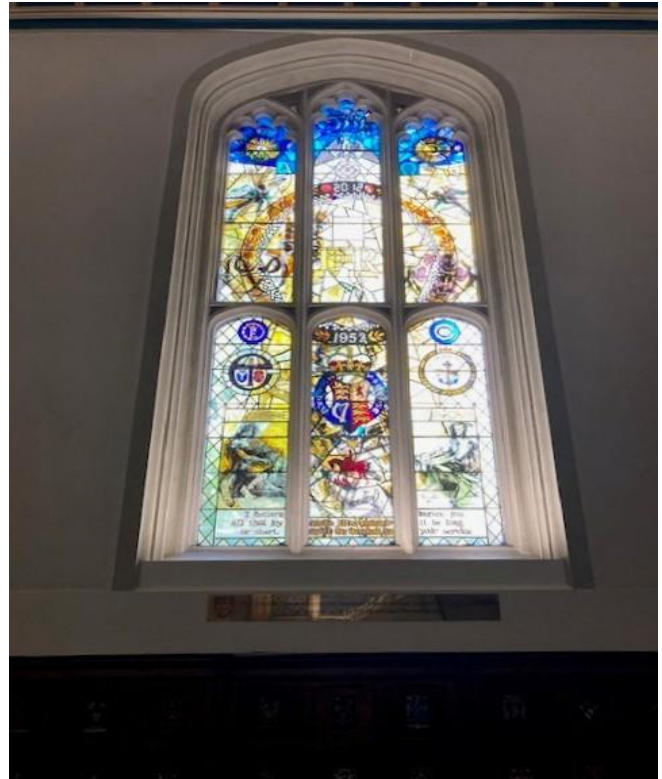
A light lunch and then short walk across Waterloo Bridge to the King's Chapel of the Savoy in Savoy Hill and where we met up with Mike Ryland and were greeted by Richard Buck, the Chapel Steward.

He introduced us to the Chaplain, Rev'd Canon Thomas Woodhouse who addressed us.

One of a group of Royal Peculiar Churches i.e. royal chapel of the reigning Monarch His Majesty the King with the best-known being Westminster Abbey – they are not subject to episcopal jurisdiction. It stands at the heart of the Duchy of Lancaster's historic central London estate.



Beautifully maintained Chapel with the stained-glass windows primarily 20th Century and a most striking ceiling dating back to 19th century but design believed to be representation of the original Tudor ceiling destroyed by fire in 1864. The chapel is dedicated in the name of Saint John the Baptist. It is the “home” of The Royal Victorian Order which was founded by Queen Victoria in 1896. Part of the state honours system, but is given at the discretion of the Sovereign and not on the advice of the Prime Minister. Round the wall are rows of plates showing the coats of arms of the knights and dames grand cross of the Order.



We retired to an ante room for tea and biscuits and in two showcases were the gowns of the RVO.

Report by Visit Organiser - Graham Westwell

11 June

Milton Keynes Theatre Visit

What better to do on a pleasant summer afternoon than pile into a few cars and whizz up the M1 motorway to one of our newest cathedral cities...?

Following previous occasional theatre trips for Village Probus Club members, your Visits Group agreed to try a new format with a small group in case that a successful event would tempt a number of members to be interested in joining in with others from time to time. David Jump did some research to put forward the suitable features; a nucleus of members interested in going to shows in groups (perhaps at relatively short notice), Milton Keynes Theatre as a more suitable venue than London's West End, an innovative play put on there with a matinee performance.

He found an acclaimed new production available for 11th June, and nine of us (members with a few partners) committed for David to book tickets. So off we went! At least, we would have done as originally planned had David not been called for some medical attention and ask yours truly to complete the logistical arrangements leading up to the day – my pleasure!

Of course, the talents of the Club membership showed through for us to organise ourselves into self-drive car-sharing from Harpenden to find our way there and be met cheerfully by ... Security Staff carrying out a bag search before allowing entry to the lobby to check tickets! The negotiating skill of our Club Chairman quickly overcame the obstacles encountered by the first arrivals not having tickets available to blag his way with the others into the lobby before the Leader arrived!

To find our Circle seats then presented no difficulty and we settled comfortably for the performance, in two Acts. The plot of marital infidelity, murder and intrigue of the heroine, **“The Girl on the Train”**, is too complicated for me to describe in detail here, but suffice to say that the acting was exemplary, we marvelled at the stage effects and the ending presented a great surprise that I should not reveal in case that would spoil your future enjoyment!

Fortunately, we were able afterwards to find our cars where we had parked them – the new multi-storey car-park is another marvel – and despite the inevitable roadworks arrive at The Black Horse, Woburn just in time to see the staff completing the place settings to accommodate us. We enjoyed conversation and a good meal, then voted that the whole Visit had been a success, thank goodness!



Look out for similar events in the future and sign up without delay – it's very much worth it!

Report by Visits Group Leader - Alan Falconer

23 June

June Walk

This walk grandly described by the National Trust owners of the Ashridge Estate as “In the footsteps of Capability Brown” was enjoyed by 10 walkers namely: Sandy Bisland, Jim Davies, Bill Douglas, Alan Falconer, David Keith, Paul Manuel, Tim Potter, Colin Robinson, Richard Upton and Graham Westwell.



But the best laid plans..... That morning the road was being closed between the Bridgewater Arms and our starting point The Monument Drive (formerly Prince's Riding) and so a detour had to be made. After dropping off the menu choices our car had to retrace and about 5 miles added on – both ways!

From our parking place looking forward we could see Ashridge House and looking back we could see the towering monument to the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater known as the “The father of Inland Navigation”. A short break for a history lesson:

Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, was a descendent of Queen Elizabeth I's Chancellor, Sir Thomas Egerton. He was a sickly boy, held in low esteem by his mother, when he inherited his title and substantial riches, including the old monastery and estates of Ashridge. But despite this unpromising start in life, as soon as he came of age, he began to spend great energy and wealth in pioneering the building of canals in the north of England, taking huge financial risks but in the end greatly enlarging his fortune. His major new waterway, built near Manchester, was named after him – the Bridgewater Canal – said to be the first true canal in Britain and some 39 miles long. There is a huge aqueduct over the River Irwell and then crosses via a swing bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal at Barton. These canals were key factors – the arteries – that allowed the industrial revolution to boom in the early 19th century.

Our chairman advised us that the monument was located about a mile from the house as the Duke's mother thought it ugly.

We crossed the B4506, through the entrance in the wooden fence that was originally part of perimeter of the deer park and down the wide Prince's Riding towards the House with the 14th and 15th holes of Ashridge Golf Course to our left. Then skirted the 16th green and alongside the 17th tees and on to the playing fields of the College. We crossed the road servicing the College and entered the Golden Valley said to be one of Capability Brown's masterpieces. He created the valley by moving hundreds of trees to the left side.



Down the Valley floor for half a mile or so and then through two copses on the right. Whilst taking a breather we came across several marbled white butterflies. We headed back along the side of the valley before cutting through the trees including many sweet chestnut and lime to the front of the House. We viewed the Courtyard Café and paused for a short history of the House.



Originally founded as a monastery by seven monks who brought a phial of Christ's blood to sanctify the site. It remained a religious and educational centre until the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, who seized it and used it as a hunting lodge. Following that, Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth I) lived at Ashridge House and was even arrested there by her sister Mary in 1554. Elizabeth later sold the estate to Thomas Egerton, and it eventually passed to the Bridgewater family, in 1604. In the early 19th century, the Bridgewaters rebuilt the estate in a Neo-Gothic style.

From early 20th century has seen various uses: 1929 Conservative Party Training HQ: 1939 Part of Charing Cross Hospital. 20,000 patients and 2,700 births: 1949 Finishing school: 1959 Executive Education College: 2015 Hult International Business School – but also now holds weddings etc etc

We crossed the lawns in front of the house and entered the pathway running parallel to Prince's Riding and followed all the way back to the B4506. At the exit to the path lies the black and white former gatekeeper's house, Thunderdell Lodge. Another 150 yards are we were back to our cars ready for the circuitous route to The Bridgewater Arms. Alas they had received the wrong delivery that morning and not everything pre chosen was available but they quickly fulfilled the amended orders.



A joint venture by Bryan King and Graham Westwell who reconnoitred the walk with Bryan then completing the organising.

Report by Walk Leader - Graham Westwell